



# ALMS: Education at Work

*"The best ideas are common property."*

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The Roman philosopher had it right. The best ideas should be shared; that's the philosophy behind the Arkansas Learning Management System.

Like most good ideas, ALMS began with a problem. An elementary teacher needed a resource to prepare her students for benchmark testing. Neal Gibson, her husband and an EAST Lab facilitator at Yellville High School, listened and came up with a solution. Using an Enhancing Education Through Technology grant, Neal developed an online system that can be used for any type of assessment or training.

That was three years ago. Today, ALMS, available free to all Arkansas schools, is an open source learning management system that allows teachers to share resources; provide online learning tools for their students; and access content and assessments covering math, literacy, science, and career and technical education courses.

Bill Dirst, who will be administering ALMS this school year for the Department of Education, is ready to take ALMS to the next level. He'd like to make it a statewide repository for test data. (Currently, school districts host the data on their servers.) He also would like to enhance the instructional modules and offer tools that students can access from home or parents can use to monitor their child's progress. And Dirst can see it being used for online professional development training for teachers.

Some changes are already in the works. As the result of an EAST Integrated Community Enhancement Program grant, ALMS will have a lot of new content this school year. Mary LaVergne, the EAST facilitator at Malvern High School, is working with several of her students this summer to add content and this year's released items from the end-of-course and benchmark exams and science and CTE frameworks to the system. It's been quite a learning experience for the paid interns.

"This started as just a summer job for me," Brandi

George, one of the student interns, says, "but now I realize the importance of what we are doing. Students in Arkansas really need ALMS to prepare them for standardized testing. Arkansas students are ready to step up and show everyone how well they can do."

Mary and the students are excited about their project and how it will help both teachers and students. "The ALMS project . . . had more things tied to it than I had first anticipated," Trevor Allen, another intern, says. "With all our group effort, I feel like we really accomplished something that will help others in the future."



Mary has used ALMS for her semester tests and class projects for the past two years. While she thinks it is a powerful resource for all teachers, she says, "there are added benefits for those of us in the career and technical areas. . . . ALMS also gives us access to release items aligned to frameworks from other subject areas, such as English and math, so that we can integrate questions from these areas into our own tests."

For more information about ALMS, visit the Web site, <http://alms.k12.ar.us:81/>, or contact Bill Dirst at (501) 517-1939.

Photos: Top, Brandi Bowdle, a student intern at Malvern High School sorts through hard copies of the frameworks being entered.

Center, the interns include Trevor Allen, front left, Mary Littles, Lisa Greene, Brandi, Lance McGriff, back left, Thad Allen, Jay Burns, Asa Shnaekel, and Nicole May.

Bottom, surrounded by stacks of hard copies, Nicole enters content on the computer.

